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# Portions and the Power of Suggestion

By ALEX MINDLIN

How small is a “small” portion? No food chain quite agrees. A small soda at Long John Silver’s, for example, is 20 ounces of liquid; a small at Pizza hut is 16. But these labels matter. The label assigned to a portion affects its apparent size, according to a study soon to be published in the Journal of Consumer Research.

In particular, larger portions seem smaller when labeled “small,” and diners who eat them even feel less full. In one experiment, college students thought a 60-piece package of mixed nuts, labeled “medium,” weighed 64.03 grams, but a “small” label shrank the package’s apparent weight nearly 20 percent, to 51.78 grams. The same effect did not occur in reverse; a 50-count package seemed no larger when labeled “medium” than when labeled “small.”

“People are more ready to believe that a medium-size package labeled ‘small’ is smaller than it is, than they are to believe that a small package is big,” said Aradhna Krishna, a professor of marketing at the [University of Michigan](#) who is an author of the study. “We call this ‘guiltless gluttony,’ because it’s a kind of rationalization: ‘It’s O.K.’ ” **ALEX MINDLIN**



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